

## How is the Government going to tackle sickness absence?

On 25th November 2008 the government published its response to the Black Report (April 2008). Amongst the 80 something pages most of the issues highlighted by Dame Black are addressed, and a number of initiatives identified in key areas. The government is calling these "aspirations that demonstrate how we will rise to the challenges set (by Dame Carol) and which will enable the delivery of our broader vision".

The areas are:

1. Creating new perspectives on health and work (Chapter 2)
2. Improving work and work places (Chapter 3)
3. Supporting people to work (Chapter 4)

Creating new perspectives on health and work: It is generally agreed that there is still a belief that people should stay off work when they have a health condition which is persisting. The benefits of work need to be promoted more widely so that this belief is challenged - "to individuals, employers, health care professionals, society and the economy".

- Electronic fit note - there has been much in the news about this one. The new fit note will replace the current medical certificate. Switching the focus and advice from what people cannot do to what they can do. The idea is hoped to improve the flow of information between employers, individuals and their GPs. This has been trialled in some parts of the UK already.

- A national education programme for GPs - improving GPs knowledge and skills and confidence when dealing with health and work issues.

- Health, Work and Well being coordinators will be appointed to create and build partnerships, engage with small businesses and "stimulate action on health, work and well being issues".

- National Centre for Working Age Health and well being - an independent, authoritative body providing core functions - gathering data, monitoring trends, determining the impact of interventions and initiatives.

Improving work and workplaces: doing more to support employers to create safe and accommodating workplaces.

- The Business Health Check Tool - enabling businesses to estimate the costs of sickness absence, turnover etc in their business, and to help identify savings and return on investments for health and well being programmes

- National Strategy for Mental Health and employment - Helping to tackle issues such as stigma and discrimination

- Further development of NHS Plus - expanding services and setting standards. To deliver cost effective Occupational Health services to SMEs
- Occupational Health Helpline for smaller businesses - a telephone helpline providing business hours access to advice for individual employee health issues
- A challenge fund - encouraging local initiatives to improve work health.
- A review of the health and well being of the NHS workforce

Supporting people to work: plans to support employers and public services to do more to help people with health conditions and disabled people to stay in, return to or move into work.

- Piloting early intervention services - including "Fit for Work" services, putting employment advisors within the Improving access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, increased numbers of employment advisors in GPs surgeries (for another 3 years)
- Access To Work - changes to the current system to improve effectiveness